SC 084 Mass Media in American Society
Spring 2012
T Th 12pm, Campion 303

Instructor: Johanna Pabst
E-mail: pabstjo@bc.edu
Office: McGuinn 410C
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:15pm-2:30pm and by appt

Course Objectives

The power and effect of the media has been long debated, and continues to be important to understand in the context of many changes in American society. This course is dedicated to investigating mass media in America, its nature and role in our lives, and its relation to American notions around race, class and gender. This course will heavily stress the ability to engage critically with the products of mass media from news broadcasts to advertising, from television to the Internet.

As this is a core course, we will be looking at the sociology of mass media with an eye towards the following concerns:

1) **The Perennial Questions**: An examination of mass media can help us think about larger questions in society, such as: How do we know when something is “true”? How open to manipulation are human beings? Is a free society possible?

2) **Cultural Diversity**: A number of readings will address the issue of cultural diversity in 21st century society, in order to appreciate the great variety of ethnic, racial, cultural perspectives and influences, as well as the ways the media can both limit and enhance such diversity. **Please note**: This course does not satisfy the official university cultural diversity requirement.

3) **Historical Perspective**: We’ll look at the mass media in a historical context, especially with regard to the development of cultural theory and the evolution of media as connected to technology.

4) **Methodology**: We’ll pay attention to the various ways the media can be studied, including organizational, interview and content analysis. You’ll learn how to study media from a sociological perspective.
5) **Writing Component:** There is a strong writing requirement in this course. You’ll be expected to react to the works we read and be able to perform your own analyses of media, as well as integrate the cultural perspectives considered in class.

6) **Creating a Personal Philosophy:** You’re encouraged to develop your own philosophy about the importance and relevance of mass media, both in your life and in an academic sense. Mass media undoubtedly had a presence in your life before this class. Hopefully, you will view it with a new lens by the end of the course.

**Course Requirements**

*Please silence your cell phones before class!*

1) **Class Attendance and Participation:** Everyone is expected to attend class and participate in discussions and exercises and on the course blog. I take daily attendance. More than 3 unexcused absences will affect your grade. Excused absences, including approved athletic events, medical appointments, and absences cleared by the dean will not lower your grade as long as they are properly documented (i.e. a note from health services, dean, etc.) I also expect you to arrive to class on time. Repeatedly late arrivals to class are disrespectful to everyone and will also affect your grade.

2) **Assigned Reading:** You must come to class having read all assigned material and be prepared to discuss it. You may be expected to lead discussion during the semester. Quizzes or in-class writing assignments may be given to assess reading. I also reserve the right to ask you to read additional short pieces that are relevant to class that I may send you throughout the semester.

3) **Reading Responses:** You will be responding weekly to readings and topics by submitting written responses throughout the semester. More detail about the structure of this assignment will be provided.

4) **Papers:** There will be 2 paper assignments assigned during the semester. These will be an opportunity for you to critically connect concepts introduced in class with your own experiences, and to conduct research. More detailed assignments will be given out when the time comes. Late papers will be penalized.

5) **Exams:** There will be an in-class mid-term and final exam which will cover the core material of the course.
Grading

Your grade will be based on the following elements:

1) Class Attendance and Participation  
   10%
2) Reading Responses  
   25%
3) 2 papers  
   15% each
4) Mid-term Exam  
   15%
5) Final Exam  
   20%
Total:  
100%

Academic Honesty

You are responsible for adhering to the statement of academic honesty in your Student Handbook and at www.bc.edu/integrity. Plagiarism is a serious offence and any evidence of it, or other breaches of integrity, will be referred to the dean and the Committee on Academic Integrity.

Disability Statement

If you have a disability, please let me know about it at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

Keeping in Touch with Me

I encourage you to drop by during my office hours if you have any questions about the readings, assignments, or concepts in general. I am also happy to make appointments outside of these hours. The best way to contact me is through my email listed at the beginning of the syllabus. I check my email frequently and will get back to you as soon as possible.

A note on email form: Please remember that these are professional communications and should be treated as such. Include a subject, sign your name, and use punctuation. Please do not use “hey” in the introduction line to emails. I prefer to be called “Professor Pabst” or “Ms. Pabst.” I will always endeavor to treat you with the same level of courtesy.
Required Readings

The following books are available in the BC Bookstore:

  - Student Study Site: [http://www.sagepub.com/croteau4e/study/intro.htm](http://www.sagepub.com/croteau4e/study/intro.htm)
- Other readings will be available on the Library’s Course Reserves (marked as * in the syllabus), or on the course’s Blackboard Vista site (marked as Vista).
Course Schedule

PART I. WHAT IS MASS MEDIA?

Tu Jan 17  Introduction

Th Jan 19  The Sociology of Media
  • C&H: Chapter 1, “Media and the Social World,” p. 3-17

Tu Jan 24  The Sociology of Media
  • C&H: Ch. 1, “Media and the Social World,” p. 17-28
  • GRC 1: Kellner, “Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture,” p. 7-18

Th Jan 26  Ideology and the Production of Ideas
  • C&H: Ch. 5, “Media and Ideology,” p. 153-177
  • GRC 4: Lull, “Hegemony,” p. 33-36

Tu Jan 31  Ideology cont’d
  • GRC 54: Ouellette, “‘Take Responsibility for Yourself’: Judge Judy and the Neoliberal Citizen,” p. 487-496
  • Reading Response #1 Due

PART II: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE BUSINESS OF MEDIA

Th Feb 2  The Business of Media
  • C&H: Chapter 2, “The Economics of the Media Industry,” p. 31-70

Tu Feb 7  Regulation and the “Public Interest”
  • C&H: Ch. 3, “Political Influence on Media,” p. 71-90, 105-111
  • *Habermas, Jurgen, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article,” p. 136-142
  • Reading Response #2 Due

Th Feb 9  The News Media and Media Organizations
  • C&H: Ch. 4, “Media Organizations and Professionals,” p. 113-138
Tu Feb 14  Politics
- C&H: Ch. 7, “Media Influence and the Political World,” p. 219-244
- Reading Response #3 Due

Th Feb 16  Advertising and Consumer Culture
- C&H: Ch. 5, p.177-184

Tu Feb 21
- GRC 27: Engstrom, “Unraveling the Knot: Political Economy and Cultural Hegemony in Wedding Media,” p. 243-253
- Assignment 1 due in class

Th Feb 23  Mid-term Wrap-up and Review

Feb 28  IN-CLASS MID-TERM

Mar 1  NO CLASS

Mar 5-9  SPRING BREAK

PART III: THE CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF MEDIA

Tu Mar 13  Post-Modernism

Th Mar 15  New Media and Technology
- C&H: Ch. 9, “Media Technology,” p. 285-308
- GRC 45: boyd, “Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites,” p. 409-417

Tu Mar 20  New Media and Technology
- C&H: Ch. 9, “Media Technology,” p. 308-322
- GRC 46: Montgomery, “Born to Be Wired,” p. 419-426
- Reading Response #4 Due
Th Mar 22  Globalization of Media  
- C&H: Ch. 10: “Media in a Changing Global Culture,” p. 325-332  

Tu Mar 27  Globalization of Media  
- C&H: Ch. 10: “Media in a Changing Global Culture,” p. 332-348  
- GRC 59: Jenkins, “Pop Cosmopolitanism,” p. 545-551  
- *Reading Response #5 Due*

PART III. AUDIENCES, REPRESENTATION AND INEQUALITY

Th Mar 29  Content and Media Effects  
- C&H: Ch. 8, Active Audiences and the Construction of Meaning,” p. 255-272  

Tu Apr 3  Active/Critical Reading of Media Texts  
- C&H: Ch. 8, Active Audiences and the Construction of Meaning,” p. 272- 284  
- GRC 7: Jenkins, “Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten,” p. 57-65  
- *Reading Response #6 Due*

Th Apr 5  EASTER BREAK

Tu Apr 10  Race, Class, and Ethnicity  
- C&H: Ch. 6, “Social Inequality and Media Representation,” p. 185-189, 190-201  
- GRC 10: Hall, “The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media,” p. 81-84

Th Apr 12  Race, Class, and Ethnicity  
- GRC 35: Rose, “‘There are Bitches and Hoes,’” p. 321-325
Tu Apr 17  
Race, Class, and Ethnicity
- C&H: Ch. 6, p. 205-212
- Reading Response #7 Due

Th Apr 19  
Gender & Sexuality
- C&H: Ch. 6, p. 201-205, 212-215
- GRC 49: Bertozzi, “‘You Play Like a Girl’: Cross-Gender Competition and the Uneven Playing Field,” p. 443-454

Tu Apr 24  
Gender & Sexuality
- GRC 9: Gerhard, “Sex and the City: Carrie Bradshaw’s Queer Postfeminism,” p. 75-79
- Assignment 2 due in class

Th Apr 26  
Gender & Sexuality
- GRC 38: Pratt, “‘This is the Way We Live and Love!: Feeding on and Still Hungering for Lesbian Representation in The L Word,” p. 341-348

Week 14:
Tu May 1  
Lingering Debates/Issues and Media Reform
- Reading Response #8 Due

Th May 3  
Wrap-Up and Review

FINAL EXAM: Mon, May 14 9 am